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MISS TOOSEY'S MISSION

BY THE AUTHOR OF
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MISS TOOSEY'S MISSION. P. 59.

MISS TOOSEY'S MISSION

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LADDIE."

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MISS TOOSEY'S MISSION.

CHAPTER I.

MISS TOOSEY always wore a black silk dress on Sunday, and went three times to church. Morning, afternoon, and evening, as soon as the bell changed at the quarter, that black silk dress came out of Miss Toosey's little house in North Street, turned the corner into High Street, crossed the Market-place, passed under the archway into the churchyard, in at the west door, and up the middle aisle, past the free seats, which occupy the lower end of Martel church, and stopped at the second pew on the left-hand side, one sitting in which has been rented by Miss Toosey for many years. This pew is immediately in front of

the churchwardens' seat, where those two dignitaries sit majestically, with a long rod placed conveniently on either hand, ready to be seized at a moment's notice, to execute judgment on youthful offenders in the free seats, though the well-known fact, that generations of paint and varnish have made them fixtures, somewhat takes off from the respect and awe felt for them. Miss Toosey is short, and the pew-door has a tendency to stick; and when you have a Bible, prayer-book, hymn-book, spectacle-case, and umbrella in your hands, you cannot enter into a struggle on equal terms; and so when Mr. Churchwarden Wyatt happens to be in church in time, he leans over and opens the pew-door for Miss Toosey, "and very kind of him too, a most gentlemanly man Mr. Wyatt is, my dear."

The black silk was quite a part of Sunday in Miss Toosey's mind, and therefore holy, to a certain extent; she would have considered it disrespectful to the day to put on any other dress, and no stress of weather

could prevent her wearing it; indeed, she thought it decidedly a want of trust in Providence to fear that heavy rain or deep snow might injure it. She would pin up the skirt inside out round her waist, with a reckless disregard of appearances, so that you could hardly guess she had any dress on at all under her shawl; but nothing would have induced her to put on another. Of late years, too, she had not felt it quite right to wear it on week-days when she was asked out to tea, it seemed to her inappropriate, like reading a regular Sunday book on week-days, which has something profane about it. It had been through many vicissitudes; not even Miss Toosey herself could accurately recall what it was in its original form, and the first distinct incident in its existence was the black crape with which it was trimmed, in respect to the memory of Miss Toosey's father, old Toosey, the parish doctor. This was fifteen years ago, and since then it had been unpicked and re-made several times, turned,

sponged, dipped, French-chalked, cleaned, trimmed and altered, till it would have required vast ingenuity to do anything fresh to it.

As the black silk was part of Sunday to Miss Toosey, so was Miss Toosey part of Sunday to many of the Martel people. The Miss Purts, the draper's daughters, in the Market-place, knew that it was time to put on their smart bonnets (the latest Paris fashion), when they saw Miss Toosey pass the window, so as to ensure their clattering into church on their high heels, tossing and giggling, not later than the *Venite*.

Old Budd, the clerk, with his white beard and wooden leg, always said "Good-morning, Miss Toosey; fine day, mum," as he stumped past her pew-door on his way to the vestry, which made her feel rather uncomfortable, as he said it out loud, and it did not seem quite right; but then Mr. Budd is such a good man, and, being a church official, no doubt he has a right to behave just as he pleases. Even Mr.

Dodson, the late curate, after baptizing fifteen pugnacious babies, all crying lustily, said, as he passed Miss Toosey on his way back to the reading-desk, wiping the beads of perspiration from his good-natured red face, "Warm work, Miss Toosey."

I think that both Mr. Peters the rector and Mr. Glover the curate, would quite have lost their place in the service if Miss Toosey's seat had been empty, as they neither of them could have preached with comfort without the fat, red-velvet cushion with the tassels, on which they laid their books.

I do not think it ever occurred to Miss Toosey that there was anything amiss in Martel church or its services. She was proud of the fine, old, grey-stone tower, which had been built when men gave willingly of their best for the service of God, and so built "for glory and for beauty;" and she loved the roof of the nave, which was rich in oak carving bleached white by time, with angels and

emblems of wonderful variety and ingenuity. And all the rest of the church she took for granted, and did not wonder at the narrow, uncomfortable pews, where, as Mr. Malone, the Irish curate, said, "it was quite impossible to kneel down, and very difficult to get up again;" or at the free seats, put behind all the others; or at the large, steep galleries; or at the high pulpit rich in red velvet and dusty fringe, on one side, and the reading desk to match on the other, with the clerk's desk underneath, where Mr. Budd did his part of the service, *i. e.* the responses, as a clerk should do, in a strident, penetrating voice, and took a well-earned nap in the sermon when his duties were discharged. It did not strike her as curious that the seats in the chancel should be occupied by the Peters family on one side and by the Rossitters on the other, while the ladies and gentlemen of the choir displayed their smart bonnets or Sunday waistcoats to great advantage in front of the organ, where, in return for their vocal

exertions, they were privileged to behave as badly as their fancies led them. You see, Miss Toosey was not critical, and she had not been to any other church for many years, and custom draws a soft curtain over imperfections, and reverence is not quick to see irreverence in others, and prayer fills the air with clouds of incense through which we cannot easily see bonnets, but only Heaven itself; and as Miss Toosey knelt, being very short, you remember, and the pews high, she could only with her outward eyes see the angels in the roof and her prayer-book. And it was just the same with the sermons; as church was church to Miss Toosey, so a sermon was a sermon. Whether it was Mr. Peters, Mr. Glover, or Mr. Malone, Miss Toosey looked out the text in her little brown Bible, and put the bookmarker, with "Love the Jews," into the place, and gave her head a little nod, as if to show that the text was there, and no mistake about it; and then took off her spectacles, wiped them, put them into a

case, gave her black silk skirt a slight shake to prevent creases, and then settled down to listen. I will not undertake to say that Miss Toosey entered into all the subtleties of doctrine set forth over the red velvet pulpit-cushion; I will not even deny that sometimes the lavender ribbons on Miss Toosey's bonnet nodded, without much connection with the arguments of the discourse, and that the words "election and grace" grew faint and dreamy in her ears, and Mr. Peters's grey hair or Mr. Glover's whiskers disappeared from her sight. I am disposed to think that she did not lose very much; but Miss Toosey took it much to heart, so much so that she could hardly believe herself capable of it, and even contended that she was listening all the time, though she closed her eyes to pay greater attention. But sometimes the sermons kept Miss Toosey awake effectually, and made her feel very uncomfortable for some days afterwards, and this was when they were on the subject of conversion.

Mr. Malone was especially strong on this point, and, after one of his powerful discourses, Miss Toosey would have a wakeful night, going through the course of her peaceful, uneventful life, trying to find that moment of awakening which other Christians seemed to find so easily, wondering if she might date her conversion from a day when she was a little child, crying and being comforted at her mother's knee; or in the quiet, sober joy of her Confirmation; or when she followed her mother up the aisle, one Easter Day, in trembling awe to her first Communion; or in the days of her simple, girlish romance long ago, when her heart was overflowing with pure happiness; or to the days following so quickly when it came to an untimely end, and she sobbed herself to sleep, night after night, with her cheek (it was round and smooth then) pressed to that same little brown Bible, with some faded flowers between the leaves; or could it have been when her father died and she

stood alone by his grave? None of these events seemed quite to answer to Mr Malone's descriptions, and sometimes Miss Toosey was driven to fear that she must rank herself with the unconverted, to whom a few scathing words were addressed at the conclusion of the sermon.

On one occasion there was a revival at Martel, and meetings were held at the school-room, one of which Miss Toosey attended. There was much heat, and hymn-singing, and excitement, and Miss Toosey was agitated, and hysterical, and impressed; but when the presiding clergyman, in an impassioned manner, invited all those who were conscious of conversion to remain, and the rest to leave, Miss Toosey, without a moment's hesitation, went out and found her way home, sobbing and broken-hearted.

Then, too, the doctrine of assurance troubled her sorely, feeling (as she did) sure only of her own weakness and God's great mercy. And so she grew very nervous and

uncomfortable when people began to talk of their religious experiences, which seemed so much more satisfactory than her own.

You must not, however, suppose that Miss Toosey was at all High Church; on the contrary, she had a horror of Puseyites and of the opinions which she fondly imagined them to hold, such, for example, as works being the only means of salvation, without the faintest mixture of faith, which, as Miss Toosey said, is so directly opposite to the teaching of the Bible. She also spoke of the danger of the "multiplication of ordinances," a well-sounding sentence which Mr. Glover was rather fond of, and Miss Toosey always gave a little triumphant sniff after saying it, for it is not every one who can make use of abstruse, theological expressions of many syllables. It is true that she went to church herself whenever there was an opportunity, and would have done so if Mr. Peters had largely increased the services, but that of course was different. She also regarded

with suspicion the efforts of some of the young ladies of the parish, who had "high" tendencies, to introduce crosses surreptitiously into the decorations at Christmas, cunningly disguised with evergreens, and of odd and ornamental shapes. She was firmly persuaded that the emblem of our faith had something Romish about it, and that it was safer to keep to circles and anchors, and triangles; indeed, she distrusted the decoration excitement among the young ladies altogether, and looked back with regret to the days when the pew-opener used to put up sprigs of holly in the windows, and fasten bushes of the same to the lamps in the chancel.

CHAPTER II.

NOW I must tell you about Miss Toosey's Mission, and I think it will surprise you to hear that her Mission was the conversion of the heathen—not the heathen at Martel, though there were enough and to spare, even in that favoured spot; not the heathen in London, or our great towns even; but the heathen in foreign parts, real *bonâ-fide* black heathen, with war-paint and feathers, and strings of beads, and all the rest of it. Her Mission began in this manner:—A missionary Bishop came to preach at Martel. I do not know quite how it happened, as he certainly did not pronounce "Shibboleth" with the same distinct and unctious intonation which was deemed essential at Martel, but I have

been told that he met Mr. Peters out at dinner, and that the rector, always good-natured, offered his pulpit, red-velvet cushion and all, for the Bishop's use on the following Sunday evening.

The Bishop gladly accepted the offer. He was not quick to see microscopic differences of opinion; the cut of a coat, a posture, or the use of a cant word, did not seem to him of such vital importance as he found attached to them among Churchmen at home, and he was fairly puzzled at the hot blood and animosity that arose from them, bidding fair even at times to rend the woven garment without seam. He had been used to a clearer, simpler atmosphere, a larger horizon, a wider span of heaven over-head, than we can get in our streets and lanes, making it easier, perhaps, to look up steadfastly, as those should whose lives are ever teaching them how far, how terribly "far, the Heaven is from the earth," where the earth lies in darkness and idolatry. To one who was used to the

difference between Christians and heathen, the differences between Churchman and Churchman seemed unutterably small, so that he was fain to say with Abraham, "Let there be no strife between us, I pray, for we are brethren."

He had come home with his heart burning within him, with the urgency of the work he left behind, confident that he could not fail to find help and sympathy in happy, rich, Christian England; in his waking thoughts, as well as in his dreams, there always stood by him a man of Macedonia, the Macedonia of his far-off labours, saying, "Come over and help us," and he found that the love of many had waxed cold, and that indifference and scarcely-concealed weariness received him wherever he went.

So he was glad to accept Mr. Peters's invitation, and though Mr. Malone looked rather sourly at him in the vestry, and even the rector was not quite so cordial to him as he had been at the dinner-party,

still he scaled the heights of the pulpit with alacrity, to the enlivening strains of "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," which not even the "Mitre Hymn-book" and the Martel choir can rob of its charms.

The text which Miss Toosey found out in her little brown Bible was from S. John, the 6th chapter and 9th verse: "There is a lad here with five barley loaves, and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?" The Bishop began by describing the scene where the miracle occurred—the barren hill-side; the blue sea of Galilee; the towns in the distance, with their white, flat-roofed houses, nestling in the green valleys like "a handful of pearls in a goblet of emerald;" the sun setting behind the purple Galilean hills, and the soft evening light touching the mountain-tops with gold, and casting long shadows on the quiet sea, where the fishing-boats were going forth to their nightly work. And then he told of the weary, foot-sore crowd, gathered on the slope of the hill, far from home, and hungry

and fainting, women and little children, as well as men, many of whom had come from far-away Capernaum and Cæsarea, skirting the north side of the lake for many a weary mile, on foot, to meet the ship that bore our Lord across the sea.

Whence can they buy bread in this wilderness? But among that helpless crowd there is One, foot-sore and weary and fasting like them, yet Who is the Creator Himself. "He Who maketh the grass to grow upon the mountains, and herb for the use of man," Who "feedeth the young ravens," and Who "filleth the hungry soul with good things;" and He is looking with infinite compassion on their want—and He says to His disciples, "Give ye them to eat." And then, abruptly, the Bishop turned from the story of the miracle to his own work, and he told of the great extent of mountain, forest, and plain, of the mighty rivers, of the rich and fertile land, and the luxuriant beauty all around, fair as the promised land of which Moses said,

"The eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." But the people of this fair land are, like the weary crowd on the hill-side, far from home—ah! how far from Heaven, with the deep, deep sea of ignorance rolling between; they are hungry, sinking for the want of the Bread of Life; but civilization and knowledge and light are far away from them across the ocean, and "how can we satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?" It is evening too; surely the sun of this world is getting near its setting, and casting long shadows, if we would but see them. Shall we send these poor souls away fasting?—these women and little children? Will they not faint by the way? How can they hope to reach their heavenly home without the Bread of Life?

But the Lord is looking on them with the same infinite compassion, and He is saying to me and to you, "Give ye them to eat." Is there not here this evening, among

you Martel people, a lad with five barley loaves and two small fishes for the Lord's use? It seemed so little to the disciples, scarcely worthy of mention. "What are they among so many?" merely enough for two or three, and here are five thousand and more. But the Lord said, "Bring them hither to Me." He had no need of them. He could have commanded the stones to be made bread; He could have called manna down from heaven; He could have satisfied them with a word; but He was graciously pleased to take that poor and humble little store in His all-powerful hand; and it was sufficient—the people were filled, they had as much as they would, and there were yet fragments that remained. Never think of the smallness, the poorness of the instrument, when it is the Master's hand that uses it, He who made this lovely world out of chaos, and formed the glorious light out of utter darkness. Do not be kept back by false humility, by thinking too much of the

insignificance and worthlessness of the gift. Give your best, — give your all. "Bring them hither to Me," saith the Lord. What have you to give? Turn over your store,—yourself, that is best of all, most worthy offering, poor though it may be—your money, your time, your influence, your prayers. Who so poor but what he has one or more of these barley loaves of daily life to offer to Him Who gave us all? I am not here to beg and entreat for your money, though to our dim sight it seems sorely needed just now, when, from village after village, the cry comes to me for teachers and for light, and I have no men or means to send them; and worse still is the silence of those who are in such utter darkness,—they do not know their own need. But still we know and believe that it is the Lord's work, and it will be done. It may not be by me or you, but in His own good time it will be done. He does not need your money; He only offers you the glorious privilege of being fellow-

workers with Him. Yours is the loss if you do not heed; the work will not suffer, only you will have had no share, only you may not have another opportunity given you, only the time may come when it will be said to you, "Forasmuch as ye did it not to these" (who are indeed poor, and sick, and in prison), "ye did it not to Me."

It was not by any means what the almshouse men called "a powerful discarse;" the old men belonging to Frowdes' charity in their snuff-coloured coats, each with a large F on the left shoulder, clustering round the north door after service, shook their heads in disapproval.

"He don't wrusstle with 'un," said old Jacobs; "he ain't fit to hold a candle to old Thwackum, down at Ebenezer. Why I have seen him punish that there pulpit cushion till the dust came out like anything, and he had to take off his neckcloth it were that wet—that's what I calls preaching now, and to think of the likes of this 'un being a Bishop."

Miss Baker too, of the firm of Silver and Baker, drapers in High Street, expressed her opinion in a high key, under an umbrella, as she went home along Church-lane, "that he did not preach the Gospel;" but then she was very particular, and the Apostle Paul himself would scarcely have come up to her standard of "Gospel" sermons.

There was not a very good collection either. You see it was partly from its being a wet evening, so that the congregation was altogether small, and it had not been given out on the preceding Sunday, and no bills had been printed and posted on the church-doors and principal public-houses in the town, as was always done in the case of sermons in aid of the Irish Church Mission, or the Jews' Society. So people had not been attracted by the announcement of a real live Bishop, and those who came had not had time to get small change, and so at the end of the sermon, with the best intentions and a natural dis-

like to pass the basket without giving anything, they found themselves devoid of the necessary threepenny-bits and sixpences. So, when Mr. Mackenzie, the tall lawyer, who always held the basket lined with green baize at the north door, emptied its contents on the vestry table, and the other baskets added their quota, there was but a poor show; and Mr. Peters, kind man, when Mr. Malone was not looking, slipped a sovereign out of his waistcoat-pocket to add to the heap, more for the honour of Martel than from interest in the Mission; and he explained that unfortunately some of his best people were not at church, and that they had had a collection so very recently, and that he hoped that next time the Bishop was in those parts—but here a warning glance from Mr. Malone cut him short, and he did not commit himself further.

What a fortunate thing it was that Mr. Peters had a curate of such high principle!

"Who was that old woman sitting in

front of Wyatt?" John Rossitter asked his mother, when the brougham door was closed and they were going down High Street slowly, with the drag on, for it was very steep, with a blurred view of lights and moving umbrellas through the rainy windows.

"My dear John, do you suppose I know every old woman in Martel?"

"No, but I thought you might have noticed her; her face was a sight to see in the sermon."

"Well, John," Mrs. Rossitter answered, rather fretfully, feeling conscious of a temporary oblivion on her own part in the middle of the sermon, "it was no wonder if any one went to sleep; the church was so hot; I felt quite faint myself."

And she felt whether her bonnet had got pushed on one side, and hoped she had not wakened with a snore.

John laughed, "I don't mean a sight to see *that* way, mother; that's not so very unusual at Martel; but it was her absorbed

interest that struck me as something out of the way."

"It must have been one of the young women at Purts'."

"My dear mother, don't insult those elegant creatures by supposing they would put on anything half so respectable as my old woman's bonnet; they would rather die first."

"Then I don't know who it could have been, unless it was Miss Toosey—lavender ribbons and hair done in a little curl on each side? Ah! then it is. Her father was old Toosey the doctor; he was parish doctor when we first came to Brooklands, and she was a pretty young girl, in a green spencer; and your father used to say——"

And here followed reminiscences unconnected with Miss Toosey's Mission, which I need not chronicle.

Mrs. Rossitter lived two miles from Martel, at Brooklands, and she attended church regularly twice on Sunday, "because it is a duty to set a right example to the

lower orders." So the lower orders around Brooklands—mostly, as far as the men were concerned, smoking their pipes in their shirt-sleeves, hanging over a pigsty, or nursing their babies—mostly, as far as the women were concerned, waxing fierce in preparations for dinner, or gossiping with their next-door neighbours—saw the Brooklands brougham pass four times on Sunday; and the children ran after and shouted "Whip behind!" and the babies were possessed with suicidal interest in the horses' feet, and toddled, or crawled, or rolled into imminent danger, according to their age or walking capacities.

When John Rossitter was down from London, he went with his mother; and when he was not, she went alone, because Humphrey altogether declined to go.

"It was more than any fellow could stand," he said, gnawing his yellow moustache, and looking down at his mother with those handsome idle grey eyes of his, which were the most convincing of arguments,

before which all her excellent reasons for attending church—such as "what people would say," and "how it would look," and "what a bad example it would set," if he did not go—crumbled to ashes. She found John more amenable, but I do not on this account credit John with any great superiority to Humphrey, only that he had greater powers of endurance, and was not so sure as Humphrey that the very surest way to please his mother was to please himself. Then, too, Sunday mornings at Brooklands were apt to hang heavy on his hands, for he had not the resources of Humphrey. He could not spend an hour or two in contented contemplation of a family of fox-terrier puppies; he found that "the points" of the very cleverest little mare in creation palled after five minutes' serious consideration, and that the conversation of grooms and stablemen still left a good deal to be desired in the way of entertainment — in fact, he had none of the elevated and refined tastes of an English

country gentleman; so John Rossitter went to church with his mother, and endured, with equal stoicism, sermons from Mr. Peters, Mr. Glover, or Mr. Malone. He did not yawn in the undisguised manner of Dr. Gardener Jones opposite, who let every one see what a fine set of teeth he had, and healthy red tongue, at short intervals; he did not go to sleep and snore like old Mrs. Robins, and one or two more; but when the regulation half-hour was over, his eyebrows would rise and the calm inattention of his face become ruffled, and his hand move quietly to his waistcoat-pocket and his watch appear, an action which Mr. Glover felt acutely in every fibre, though his back was turned to John Rossitter, and he would grow red to the very finger-tips, and his "finally," "lastly," and "in conclusion," would get sadly muddled in his nervous efforts to make short cuts to the end. So strong had this habit of inattention become, that it would have required something much more striking than our missionary Bishop to startle him out of it,

and it was only the sight of Miss Toosey's face that brought back his thoughts from their wanderings, to Martel church and its sleepy congregation, and the Bishop's voice from the high pulpit. He could see her through a vista of heads between Mr. Cooper's bald head and Miss Purts' feathers and pink rosebuds; now and then the view was cut off by Mrs. Robins giving a convulsive nod, or one of the little Miss Coopers fidgeting up a broad-brimmed hat.

"Was the sermon so eloquent?" John Rossitter wondered. Certainly that listening, rapt face was—quite a common, little, wizen, old-maidish face, with nothing intellectual or noble about it, and yet transfigured into something like beauty with the brightness of a reflected light. Don't you know how sometimes a scrap of broken glass on a dust heap will catch the sunlight and shine with quite dazzling brilliancy, and how a little smutty raindrop in a London court will hold the sun and a gleaming changing rainbow in its little mirror?

CHAPTER III.

"WHERE does Miss Toosey live?" said John Rossitter, on Monday morning; "I think I may as well go and call on her, as I have nothing else to do."

I do not know what impelled him to go. It is impossible to define motives accurately, even our own. We cannot say sometimes why we do a thing; every reason may be against it—common sense, habit, inclination, experience, duty, all may be pulling the other way, and yet we tear ourselves loose, and do the thing, urged by some invisible motive of whose existence we are hardly conscious. And if it is so in ourselves, how much more difficult to dissect other people's motives! and it is generally safer to leave the cause alone

altogether, and only regard the effects produced. So it is enough to say that, on that Monday morning, Miss Toosey heard the rattle of wheels along North Street, and, looking out, saw the Rossitters' dog-cart and high-stepping chestnut mare, which, to her extreme surprise, stopped in front of her door.

"Something wrong with the harness," she concluded, as the little groom flew out, and stood at the horse's head, with his arms crossed.

"Bless the child!" Miss Toosey said, "as if the creature could not have swallowed him at a mouthful, top-boots and all!"

But her observation of the groom from the bedroom window was interrupted by a loud knock at the door, and before she nad time to tie her cap-strings, or put a pin in the back of her collar, Betty came rushing up out of breath and red-faced, with a card held in the corner of her apron, bearing the name "Mr. John Rossitter."

"And he said he hoped as how you'd excuse his calling so early—and a flower in his button-hole beautiful," added Betty, in a snorting whisper, distinctly audible in the parlour below.

Then followed some hasty opening and shutting of drawers, and hurried footsteps; and then Miss Toosey descended, rather fluttered and nervous, with her Sunday cap on, and a clean pocket-handkerchief.

"I must introduce myself, Miss Toosey," John said, "for I dare say you have quite forgotten me."

"Forgotten you, Mr. John? Why, I knew you long before you were born, or thought of. Oh, dear!" said Miss Toosey, "I don't mean that, of course; but I knew your mamma before *she* was born——"

"I ought to apologize," John struck in, anxious to save Miss Toosey from any further floundering in the bogs of memory, "for coming so early; but the fact is, that I am going up to London this evening, and my mother tells me that Dr. Toosey had

a very capital cure for toothache, and she thought you would very likely have kept it, and would let me have it."

Impostor that he was! looking at her with such serious, earnest eyes, when he had composed this ridiculous and bare-faced excuse for calling as he came along.

Miss Toosey racked her brain to remember this renowned remedy, and could only recall an occasion when she had tooth-ache, and her father dragged out a double tooth with great exertion and bad language on his part, and great pain and many tears on hers.

"I cannot quite remember the remedy your mamma means; but I have a book full of very valuable prescriptions, which I will find at once."

"Pray don't trouble, Miss Toosey; I have no toothache at present; but if you would let my mother have it some time at your leisure, I should be greatly obliged."

And then they talked for five minutes about toothache; and John, smiling, showed

such white even teeth that you would have fancied he had not had much trouble with them, and you would have fancied right.

"What a curious book you have here," John Rossitter said, looking at a book lying open on the table. It was an old book, called *Voyages and Adventures*, and it was open at an awful picture of a cannibal feast, with a man being roasted in front of a fire, and a group of savages dancing ferociously round, in all the horrors of war-paint and feathers, and in a simple but effective costume of a necklace, a fringe round the waist, a ring in the nose, and a penny in the under lip.

Miss Toosey blushed; she was not used to fashionable picture-galleries where Eves and Venuses, in unadorned beauty, are admired and criticised by the sensible young people of the present day.

"Though to be sure," she said afterwards, "it's not so bad as the poor things are black, so they don't look quite so naked;

and I always think a white pig is a more indecent-looking creature than a black one."

So she turned his attention with great tact to the atlas that was also lying open on the table. It was the atlas that was in use fifty years ago, and which had been bought for Miss Toosey when she went to Miss Singer's "Academy for Young Ladies" to be finished. At this abode of learning, she had been taught to make wax-flowers and do crochet, to speak a few words of what was supposed to be French, and to play a tune or two laboriously on the piano, an education which was considered very elegant and elaborate at that time, but would hardly, I am afraid, qualify her for one of the Oxford and Cambridge local examinations, or even for a very high standard at a national school. She had also learnt a little geography and the use of the globes, but not enough to survive for fifty years; and she felt quite at sea this morning, when she reached down the

long-unused atlas to find the position of the diocese of Nawaub, and, after long study, had arrived at the conclusion that it must be on the celestial globe, which had always been a puzzle to her.

It was no wonder that she had not been able to find Nawaub, for where the towns, and rivers, and mountains, and plains stood, which the Bishop had described, there was only marked on the map, "Undiscovered territory," a vague-looking spot altogether, gradually shading off into the sea without any distinct red or blue line to mark the extent of *terra firma*, as in other parts of the world.

John Rossitter showed her where he imagined Nawaub to be, and then inquired if she were interested in Missions.

"Well, Mr. John," Miss Toosey said, "I don't mind telling you, though I have not told any one else, except Betty; but I've made up my mind to go out to Nawaub as soon as I can arrange everything."

"As a missionary, Miss Toosey?"

"Yes, Mr. John, as a missionary."

She spoke quite quietly, as if she were not sixty-five, with a tendency to asthma, and more than a tendency to rheumatism, a nervous, fidgety old maid, to whom a journey to Bristol was an event to flutter the nerves, and cause sleepless nights, and take away the appetite for some time beforehand. I think the very magnitude of her resolution took away her attention from the terrible details, just as we lose sight of the precipices, chasms, and rocks that lie between, when we are looking to the mountain-top. The way to Bristol was beset with dangers, such as losing the train, getting wrong change when you take your ticket, the draughtiness of the waiting-room, the incivility of the porters, the trains starting from unexpected platforms, the difficulty of opening doors and shutting windows, the constant tendency to get into smoking-carriages by mistake, not to speak of railway accidents, and murderers and thieves for travelling companions; but

these were lost sight of in the prospect of a journey to the other end of the world, full of real substantial dangers of which she was ignorant. This ignorance was no doubt a great help to her in some ways; she could not form the slightest idea of what a missionary's life really is; nor can you, reader, nor can I, though we may have read missionary books by the dozen, which Miss Toosey had not. But this same ignorance, while it covered up many real difficulties, also painted grotesque horrors before Miss Toosey's mind, which might well have frightened any old maiden lady of sixty-five. She mixed up "Greenland's icy mountains" and "Afric's coral strands" with great impartiality in her ideas of Nawaub, forming such a frightful combination of sandy deserts and icebergs, lions and white bears, naked black savages and snowdrifts, that the stoutest heart might have quailed at the prospect; and yet, when Miss Toosey came down to breakfast that morning, with her mind

firmly made up to the venture, her little maid, Betty, did not notice anything remarkable about her, except that her cap was put on wrong side in front, which was not a very unusual occurrence, and that she stirred up her tea with her spectacles once. Her interview with Betty had been rather upsetting. Betty was not quick at taking in new ideas, and she had got it so firmly into her head that Miss Toosey was wishing to administer a reproof to her about the handle of a certain vegetable dish, "which come to pieces in my hand as was that cracked," that it was some time before she could be led to think differently; but when at last a ray of the truth penetrated her mental fog, her feelings can only be described by her own ejaculation, "Lor, now!" which I fear may offend ears polite. She had not been at church the evening before, having stepped round to see her mother, who was "doing nicely, thank you, with her fourteenth, a fine boy, as kep on with fits constant, till Mr. Glover

half-christened him, which James Joseph is his name, and better ever since."

So it required all Miss Toosey's eloquence to put her scheme before Betty's plain common sense, so as to appear anything but a very crazy notion after all; and it was not till after half-an-hour's severe talking, and more than one tear falling on the two and a half pounds of neck of mutton, that Betty gave in, which she did by throwing her apron over her head, and declaring, with a sob, that if Miss Toosey "would go for to do such a thing, she (Betty) would take and go too, that she would," and Miss Toosey had to entreat her to remember her poor mother before making up her mind to such a step.

But to come back to John Rossitter. He was a barrister, you must know, and used to examine witnesses, and to turn their heads inside out to pick out the grains of truth concealed there; and then, too, he had a great talent for listening, which is a rarer and more valuable gift

even than that of fluent speech, which he also had at command on occasion. He had too a sympathetic, attentive interest in his face, that, if it was assumed, would have made a great actor of him, and that opened the people's hearts to him, as the sun does the flowers. And so Miss Toosey found herself laying her mittened hand on his coat sleeve, and looking up into his eyes for sympathy, and calling him "my dear," "just for all the world," she said, "as if he had been an old woman too."

And what did he think of it all? Was he laughing at her? Certainly now and then there was a little twitch at the corner of his mouth and a sparkle in his eye, and once he laughed aloud in unconcealed amusement; but I like John Rossitter too well to believe that he was doing what Dr. Gardener Jones called "getting a rise out of the old lady." It was so very easy to make fun of Miss Toosey, and draw her out and show up her absurdities,—even Mr. Glover, who was not a wit, could be

exquisitely funny at her expense. But John Rossitter was too much of a sportsman to aim with his small-bore rifle at a little sparrow in a hedgerow, he left that sort of game for the catapults and pop-guns of the yokels.

And so Miss Toosey confided to him all the difficulties that had already come crowding into her head as she sat over her work that morning, any one of which would have occupied her mind for days at any other time,—the giving notice to leave her house, the disposal of the furniture,—"and you know, Mr. John, I have some really valuable pictures and things," and she could not trust herself to glance at the portrait of old Toosey over the fireplace, in a black satin waistcoat and bunch of seals, a frilled shirt, a high complexion, and shiny black hair, with Corinthian pillars behind him, lest her eyes, already brimful, should overflow. She even consulted him as to whether it would be worth while to order in more coal, and lamented that

she should have taken her sitting in church for another whole year only last Saturday. And then, without quite knowing how, she found herself discussing that all-important subject, dress, with John Rossitter.

"Though to be sure, Mr. John, how should you know about such things?"

"Indeed, Miss Toosey, I'm not so ignorant as you think, and I quite agree with you that nothing looks so nice as a black silk on Sunday."

And Miss Toosey at once resolved to put a new braid round the bottom of the skirt as a good beginning of her preparations.

"I've got upstairs," Miss Toosey said, reflectively, "a muslin dress that I wore when Rosina Smith was married. You remember Rosina Smith, Mr. John? No, of course not! she must have married before you were born. Sweet girl, Mr. John, very sweet! That dress has been rough dried for thirty years, and it's not quite in the fashion that ladies wear now—in fact the skirt has only three breadths'

which is scanty, you know, as dresses go; but I thought," and here Miss Toosey glanced timidly at the picture of the cannibals, which still lay open, "that perhaps it would not matter out there."

"No, indeed, Miss Toosey," John answered, "I should think three breadths would appear liberal and ample allowance among people whose skirts"—he was going to say, "are conspicuous from their absence," but from Miss Toosey's heightened colour he changed it to—"are not court trains."

The next question was whether she had better have it got up before leaving Martel.

"It might get crumpled in packing; but then, how can one guess what sort of laundresses one may find at the other side of the world — not used most likely to getting up fine things."

"I have heard," said John, very seriously, "that in some parts missionaries try as much as possible to become like the

nations they are wishing to convert, and that the Roman Catholic priests in China shave their heads and wear pigtails."

"Yes, Mr. John, I have heard that," Miss Toosey said; "and their wives" (you see she did not rightly understand the arrangements of our sister Church as to the celibacy of the clergy) "cripple their feet in small shoes, blacken their teeth, and let their finger-nails grow."

"I suppose," says John, drawing *Voyages and Adventures* nearer, and looking at the pictures reflectively, "that the Nawaub missionaries don't go in for that sort of thing."

Miss Toosey grew red to the very finger tips, and her back stiffened with horror.

"No, Mr. John, there is a point beyond which I cannot go!"

"To be sure! to be sure!" said John, consolingly, "and you see there were no signs of anything of the kind about the Bishop."

"Then there is the food," Miss Toosey

went on, reminded of the subject by a whiff of roast mutton from the kitchen; "I'm afraid they are cannibals, and I don't think I ever could get used to such a thing, for I have never been able to touch sucking-pig since an uncle of mine said it was just like a baby, though of course he was only in joke."

John reassured her on this point. But now he presented quite a new difficulty to her mind.

"Do you understand the Nawaub language? I am told it is difficult to acquire."

It had never occurred to Miss Toosey that these mysterious people, who were a sort of combination of monkey and chimney-sweep, spoke a language of their own which she could not understand, and that they might not be able to comprehend the pure Somersetshire English with which she meant to convert them. She had never been brought much in contact with foreigners, so that she had never realized fully the effect of the Tower of Babel. One day a

French beggar had come to the door, and Miss Toosey had summoned up courage to pronounce the magic words "Parlez vous Français," which was one of the sentences she had learnt at Miss Singer's, and the beggar (the French being proverbially quick witted) had recognized his native tongue, and thereupon ensued such a torrent of rapid speech and violent gesticulation, such gabbling and grimacing, that Miss Toosey was quite frightened, and relapsed into plain English when she could edge in another word. But then this impudent fellow pretended he did not understand, and kept on saying, "Not know de English vot you mean," though Miss Toosey spoke slowly and very loud, and even finally tried a little broken English, which must be easier to foreigners than the ordinary style of speaking. But the man was obstinate, and went away at last shaking his head and shrugging his shoulders in a way which Miss Toosey felt was very impudent; "but then, poor creature, he may have been a papist."

"I've not thought about that, Mr. John; but I know that savages always like beads and looking-glasses, though what pleasure such remarkably plain people can get out of a looking-glass I can't imagine. But I've a lot of beads put away in one of my boxes upstairs when I've time for a regular good turn out; and as for looking-glasses, I saw some the other day at Gaiter's with gilt frames, for a penny, that make one's nose look crooked, and one eye larger than the other, that I think will do nicely."

"By Jove!" says John, "an uncommonly good idea—the very thing! I'll take a look at them as I go home, which I must do now, or I shall be late for lunch."

But before leaving he advised her not to do anything in a hurry, but before taking any decided step, such as having her dress starched, or giving notice to leave her house, or laying in a stock of looking-glasses, to consult some old friend, on whose opinion she could rely.

"There's Mackenzie," he said, "why not go to him?"

But Miss Toosey had an uncomfortable feeling about lawyers, connecting them with verses in the Gospels beginning with "woe"; and though the little Mackenzies were her great friends and constant visitors, she avoided their father. She suggested Miss Baker, but when she added that she was "a really Christian person," John discouraged the idea, and they finally agreed that she should consult Mr. Peters, who had known her nearly all her life.

"He's not a bad sort of old fellow out of church," John said, rather shocking Miss Toosey by his want of reverence for the rector; "and he has got some sense in his head as well as good nature. So you go to him, Miss Toosey, and the next time I come home I'll come in and have another crack with you, if you are not off to the North Pole or the Moon."

John Rossiter smiled more than once as he drove home in the dog-cart, at the

recollection of Miss Toosey's confidences; but I fear my readers may have grown impatient of the absurdities of an ignorant old woman, who had got a craze in her head. Yes, she was old, and poor, and weak, and ignorant, it is quite true. It was a very contemptible barley-loaf which she had to offer, compared with your fine, white, wheaten cake of youth, and riches, and strength, and learning; but remember she offered her best freely, willingly, faithfully, and when once a thing is offered it is no longer the little barley-loaf in the lad's hand, but the miraculous, satisfying Bread of Heaven in the hand of the Lord of the Harvest, more than sufficient for the hungry multitude.

CHAPTER IV.

"YOU are making fun of me, Mr. John."

"I am incapable of such an action, Miss Toosey."

Six months have passed since my last chapter, and John Rossitter has paid many visits to the little house in North Street. Indeed, he rarely came to Brooklands without going to see Miss Toosey, drawn by a strange attraction which he hardly understood himself, though he once told his mother that he had fallen in love, and asked her how she would like Miss Toosey for a daughter-in-law.

Miss Toosey is still at Martel, and likely to remain so. Her interview with Mr. Peters put an end to her idea of becoming a missionary, as John Rossitter quite expected, and also provided the rector with

a good joke, over which he laughs till the tears run down his checks. It was a very alarming interview to Miss Toosey altogether, as the rector was seized with an attack of coughing in the middle, and sputtered and choked till Miss Toosey longed to pat him on the back, if she had dared to venture on such a familiarity with a Church dignitary, and for many months she puzzled Mrs. Peters by anxious inquiries after the rector's cold, and the sad delicacy of his throat, and advised gargling with port-wine and alum, and other decoctions of marvellous efficacy.

Miss Toosey's missionary ardour was by no means damped, only it was turned into a fresh channel. "Your money," the bishop had said, "was another of those barley-loaves of every-day life that most people had in some proportion to offer;" —thinking principally of the luxury and extravagance of fashionable life, and of the superfluity that might so well be cast into his empty treasury. There was not much

luxury or extravagance in the little house in North Street, indeed, it was only by close management that two ends could be brought to meet, and even in little charities to poor neighbours (infinitesimally small though they might be) she was never in danger of offering to God that which cost her nothing. So it was an unsatisfactory thing to review her expenditure, with a view to greater economy, "with butchers' meat quite a fancy price, and everything else to match;" but she was not easily daunted, as you know, and she applied to Mr. Peters to procure her a box in which to collect for the Nawaub Mission. She did not allow him to forget it or to convince her that a Church Missionary box, or one for the Irish Society, would do quite as well, and when at last she had it, she carried it home with great pride, and gave it the place of honour in the centre of her table on the bead mat, in place of the lava inkstand that had been one of Mrs. Toosey's wedding presents.

It was this box that was now forming the subject of conversation between her and Mr. Rossitter, for she was to take it that very afternoon to the rectory to be opened, and the contents were to be forwarded to the bishop. John had been commenting on its weight, and had told Miss Toosey that she would be obliged to have the omnibus from the "Hare and Hounds" to take it to the rectory, or at any rate a wheel-barrow and a strong man. And so it came that she accused him of laughing at her.

"But it really is very heavy. I wonder you are not afraid of thieves coming to carry it off at night."

"Well, Mr. John, I was rather nervous now and then. There have been very odd noises at night, and though Betty says it's the mice, I can't always quite believe it. I always hide the box when I go out, and now and then I forget where I put it, and, oh dear! what a search we had the other day! I was in such a fright, and where

do you think it was? Why behind the shavings in the fireplace. Wasn't it a capital place? No thief would have dreamt of looking there."

"It's a good thing that you are going to empty it to-day, or I might nave been tempted to play burglar to-night."

"Well, you see, Mr. John, it's not really so valuable as you might think, for it's chiefly pence and a good sprinkling of farthings, and they don't come up to much of a sum. You see I have been obliged to take a little here and a little there, not being rich, Mr. John, or having much to spare. One thing I always put in, 'Your change with thanks;' don't you know those pretty little envelopes that they put pence in at Knight's and Jones's and one or two other places, with 'Your change with thanks,' in mauve on the back? I always took that for my box, and I felt quite pleased when they had not a threepenny bit, so that I got more pence. And then, when the butcher's book came

to five and sixpence halfpenny, Mr. Barker often says, 'Never mind the halfpenny, Miss Toosey,' and I put it into my box; and sometimes I get a halfpenny on the washing. Of course it seems very little, but it all helps. And then I fine myself. I got a good deal that way. A halfpenny if I lose my spectacles. A penny if I go to sleep in church; yes, Mr. John, I'm sorry to say I do drop off now and then. I know it's very wrong, but it's wonderful how it cures you of such habits if you have to pay for them; I don't lose my spectacles half so often as I used to, indeed I feel quite vexed sometimes that I don't get more fines; but I don't think it fair to lose them on purpose. I might save a good deal more if it wasn't for Betty. She's a good girl and honest, and much attached to me; but she's very obstinate and wrong-headed. The fuss that girl made about my letting the fire out now and then of an afternoon, for the winter has been mild, Mr. John, and coals such a price! After

I'd done it once or twice, she found out it was not an accident, and she would come bouncing in and put on coals every half-hour, till there was a fire fit to roast an ox; and once she gave warning because I did not take a second helping at dinner. But there's one thing I can do without another year, which no one can object to, and that is my sitting in church. The free-seats are so comfortable that it really would be a change for the better, except perhaps as to the hearing."

Just at this point some fresh visitors arrived, and John prepared to go, but finding the passage blocked by a double perambulator, and a smiling nurse and nursemaid exchanging confidences with Betty at the door, and hearing the tallest of the visitors (who was about as high as the table) declare that "Mamma said they were not to stop, but she sent her love and the *Graphic*," he resumed his seat and offered a knee and an inspection of his watch to the two nearest young Mackenzies. There were

nine young Mackenzies, of all ages; every year a fresh curly head or Sunday hat appeared in the square pew by the north door, which Mr. Peters compared to a pigeon pie, till at last it ran over altogether into another seat by the pulpit, which could hardly contain them now.

Miss Toosey's present visitors were the younger detachment, all of them pretty more or less with that beauty which has been called "the sacrament of goodness and innocence"—cheerful souls, not tall enough to see troubles—very well contented with life as seen from near the ground, which is, I fancy, a much more amusing point of view than we enjoy. They had a good deal of information to give, unintelligible to John, but Miss Toosey gave a free translation, which enlightened his darkness. Life was more than usually cheerful that morning, for they had met that walking money-bag, papa, as they went out, whose store of pennies was inexhaustible, when he could be cajoled or

teased into feeling in his pocket. To-day, in a moment of lavish generosity, he had given a penny all round, even to Kitty, who had conveyed it at once to her mouth, without waiting for the visit to Mrs. Good-enough's, which transformed pennies into all that heart can desire.

"Mine penny!" says Mabel, who is rather solemnized by her position on John's knee, and she allows him to catch a glimpse of her treasure, clasped tightly in her soft knitted glove, in which the fingers live all together in dimpled friendliness, and the thumb only enjoys a house to itself.

"What are you going to buy?" asks John.

"Bung," is the decided answer.

Meanwhile the other children are examining the money-box on the table, rattling its contents in a manner deafening to older ears, till Miss Toosey begins to tell them of the poor little black children who never go to church or say their prayers, which rouses great interest.

"Naughty, wicked little children," is the universal opinion.

"Poor little things!" says Miss Toosey, reprovingly, "they have not any church to go to, and they have never been taught to say their prayers."

I am afraid some of the little Mackenzies were disposed to envy the little black children, who could go straight into their cribs when they were sleepy, and play at dolls any day in the week. But they were discreetly silent while Miss Toosey explained that the money in the box was to go out to make them good little black boys and girls.

"Make them white," says Ben, decisively.

Miss Toosey is embarrassed, regarding things from a severely literal point of view; but John comes to the rescue.

"Yes, that's about it, young man."

And just then Maudie discovers the "dear little darling hole" at the top where the pennies go in, and all the children

admire it and feel it, and Mabel pats with her woolly gloves, repeating gravely, "Make black boy white."

I don't know quite how it happened, for all the other children were under the sofa, trying to catch Sammy the cat, and Miss Toosey distracted by her anxiety lest they or the cat should get hurt, and Mabel was placidly tapping the box with her penny, repeating, "Make black boy white" at intervals, when John heard a sudden rattle, and, looking down, said, "Hullo!" for the knitted glove was empty, and Mabel looked up at him with rather an awe-struck face, repeating, "Make black boy white."

"Oh, Mr. John!" Miss Toosey exclaimed, with her eyes filling with tears, "the dear, sweet little angel, giving her little all to the Mission! How touching!—how beautiful!"

John, however, whose eyes were not full of tears, saw an ominous quivering about the little angel's under lip, and an anxious feeling of knitted gloves round the "dear,

darling little hole," as if the penny might yet be recovered, and as if the giver had not realized the fatal and irretrievable nature of putting into a missionary box. The full sense of her loss at last overwhelmed her, and she burst into uncontrollable grief—"I wants my penny," being the burden of the tale.

It was in vain John handed her over to Miss Toosey, who quickly supplied her with another penny, and supplemented it with a biscuit and a lump of sugar; it was not "mine penny, what papa give me!" and at last she was carried off sobbing, and casting looks of fear and aversion at the missionary-box on the table.

That afternoon, as John was on the way to the station, he saw Miss Toosey wending her way thoughtfully up High Street, and he crossed over and joined her. She was on her way home from the Rectory, and her first remark to John Rossitter was—

"Do you believe in miracles, Mr. John?"

"As described in the Bible?"

"Oh, no; of course every one believes in them. I mean miracles now?"

"Well, Miss Toosey, if you mean winking Virgins and hysterical peasant girls, I am afraid I am rather sceptical."

"Ah, Mr. John! that's what I thought to myself. It's Popish to believe in such things nowadays—all superstition and such like—so I'm glad I did not tell Miss Baker what came into my head."

"May I ask what it was? I don't think you are at all Popish."

"Well, I'll tell you. It's my missionary-box. Now, Mr. John, how much do you think there was in it?"

"I have not the least idea."

"Well, there was six pounds nine and sevenpence three farthings." Miss Toosey's voice sank to an impressive whisper, and she stood still, looking at John as if he might be so overcome by surprise as to drop his bag and umbrella, or require support to prevent him from falling. But he only said—

"You don't say so," in a very ordinary tone of voice.

"Six pounds nine and sevenpence three farthings," repeated Miss Toosey, emphasizing the six pounds, as if he had not appreciated the vastness of the sum.

"Ah!" said John; "I'm sure it does credit to you, Miss Toosey; who would have thought that 'Your change, with thanks' would have added up so. I am afraid you must have gone to sleep in church very often."

"But it could not have been that," went on Miss Toosey, solemnly. "One pound nine and sevenpence three farthings were principally in coppers, and any sixpenny or fourpenny-bits I could account for. But the five pounds were in a note, so it could not have been change or a fine."

"You must have slipped it in some day by chance with other money."

"No, for I never have notes. When I draw my money I always get it in gold, for I am always afraid of notes blowing into

the fire or getting torn up. And, besides," went on Miss Toosey, "I'm not so rich, Mr. John, that I could lose even sixpence without knowing it."

"It is very strange," said John.

"Strange!" seemed a mild expression to Miss Toosey, to whom it appeared miraculous. "I don't know how to account for it, Mr. John. I suppose it's wrong to think it a miracle, but I could not help thinking of what happened this morning."

"What was that?"

"Why don't you remember that dear child putting her penny into the box?"

"Oh, yes, and making such a hullaballoo afterwards."

Miss Toosey had not wished to recall that part of the affair. "It was so sweetly done."

"Yes, but you gave it back directly."

Miss Toosey felt quite cross at such inconvenient remarks, interrupting her miracle; but she continued, relapsing into a confidential whisper—

"You see, Mr. John, it was a lad that brought the five barley loaves, and I thought perhaps the baby's penny might have been turned into a five-pound note."

John made no comment, and she went on as much to herself as to him,—

"I suppose it's Popish to think of such a thing, and besides, one would have thought if it had been a miracle it would have been quite a new Bank of England note; but it was one of Tuckey's, crumpled and dirty, that had been cut in half, and joined down the middle with the edge of stamps, and it had Mr. Purt's name written on the back. But still," said Miss Toosey, wistfully, as they came to the station-road, and John shook hands in parting, "it's God that gives the increase anyhow, miracle or not, and He knows all about it."

CHAPTER V.

MIRACLES do not happen every day, and Miss Toosey's money-box did not contain a bank-note the next time it was opened, or any sum that Miss Toosey could not well account for; indeed, it was rather less than more than she expected, even though the cost of her sitting in church was added to it. She did not, however, carry out her plan of sitting in the free seats, for when she spoke to Mr. Budd about giving up her seat, Mr. Peters happened to be present, and he would not hear of such a thing. "Why, Miss Toosey, we should not know ourselves if you were not in your usual place." And Mr. Budd added, that "Some one, as did not wish to be mentioned, had offered to pay the rent

rather than Miss Toosey should give it up." So it was arranged that she should still occupy the seat, at any rate till it was wanted for some one else, and as the Martel congregations were not overflowing, Miss Toosey was not likely to be turned out. She did not quite like this arrangement: she felt rather like an impostor as she passed the free seats and Mr. Wyatt opened the pew door for her, and it took off much of the pleasure when she dropped the money (that would otherwise have been paid to Mr. Budd) into her box, for, as she said, she did not feel the want of it, so it hardly seemed like giving at all.

I must not stop to describe at any length Miss Toosey's other missionary efforts, though she did not forget the other barley-loaves of which the Bishop had spoken, "her time, her influence, and her prayers," or I could tell you of her numerous disappointments in answering advertisements such as—"To those of either sex, anxious to increase their income;" and "£2 weekly

easily realized," and of her venturing a 5*s.* subscription to a "Ladies' Needlework Society," which entitled her to send six articles for sale to a shop in a fashionable part of London, and how she accomplished an antimacassar of elaborate design to send up there. As to her influence, that was a puzzling matter to one who had such a humble opinion of herself as Miss Toosey, and she nearly worked herself into a nervous fever through her attempts to mention the subject to some of the wealthy shopkeepers or others in Martel, and at last she adopted the plan of distributing leaflets, and invested in a small bundle on missionary subjects, which she left about in a surreptitious, stealthy way, in shops, or at the railway-station, or slipped between the pages of a "Society" book, or even sometimes on the high road, with a stone to keep them from blowing away. Even with these precautions she managed to give great offence to Mrs. Gardener Jones, who found a leaflet in a book sent on from Miss Toosey's, and

who, being of a very dark complexion and Eastern cast of countenance, took the matter as a personal insinuation about her birth. So it was quite a relief to Miss Toosey to turn to the last barley-loaf that the Bishop had mentioned—"her prayers;" at any rate, she could give that with all her heart. She found a missionary prayer in an old magazine, written in an inflated, pompous style, with long words, and involved sentences, as different as possible from the great simplicity of that prayer in which children of all ages and degrees of learning through all time are taught to address "Our Father"; but she was not critical, and the feeling she expressed in those words was not rendered less simple or earnest by its pompous clothing.

"Where is Miss Toosey?" John Rossiter asked his mother one Sunday morning, as they drove home from church; "she was not there this morning."

"Well, I think I heard some one say she was ill. Yes, it was Mr. Ryder told me

she was laid up with cold or something. She has not been at church for several Sundays, and really the draught from the vestry-door is dreadful."

After church, that evening, a sudden impulse seized John to go and see how Miss Toosey was, and when he had packed his mother into the brougham, with her rugs and furs, he turned off towards North Street, among the groups of people returning from church. It was a cold October evening, with great solemn bright stars overhead, and a frosty stillness in the air, which sets one listening for something above the trifling noises of this little world. Sunday visitors were rare at Miss Toosey's, and as Betty said, "It give her quite a turn," when John's sharp knock came at the door.

"She's very middlin'," she said, in answer to John's inquiries, "and she've been terribly low this evening, as ain't like her."

"What's the matter?"

"Well, Mr. Ryder do say as it's the

brongtypus and indigestion of the lungs," said Betty in an awful voice, feeling that so many syllables must prove fatal, "and as I was setting by the kitching fire last night a coffin popped right out, and——"

"All right," said John. "Is she in bed?"

"No, she ain't kep' her bed a whole day, though she did ought to. But come in, doee now; it will cheer her up a bit to see you."

John Rossitter was quite shocked to see the change in Miss Toosey when he went into the parlour. She was sitting in the arm-chair by the fire, wrapped up in a big shawl, looking so small, and shrunken, and old, and feeble, that you could hardly have recognized the brisk little lady, who was prepared to cross the seas and enter on the toils and perils of a missionary life; indeed she looked more ready for the last short journey across Jordan's narrow stream, which ends all our travelling days, and to enter into the life where toils and perils are

replaced by rest. She had been crying too, and could hardly summon up a wintry smile to receive John, and the tears overflowed more than once, while he talked of his journey down, and his mother's rheumatism, and the tree that had been blown down the night before in their garden, trying to interest her and distract her thoughts by talking on indifferent subjects. His hand was resting on the table as he spoke, and without thinking, he took hold of the missionary-box close by, and weighed it in his fingers. He hardly knew what he had in his hand, till Miss Toosey burst out crying, and covered her eyes with her handkerchief.

"It is nearly empty," sobbed the poor old lady; "nearly empty!"

And then John Rossitter pulled his chair nearer to hers, and laid one of his warm strong hands on her poor little weak cold one, and said, "What is it you are fretting about? Tell me."

And then she told him, sometimes inter-

rupted by her sobs, sometimes by the fits of coughing that left her very breathless and exhausted. It had all failed, all the five barley-loaves she had had to offer; they were all worthless. She was too old, and foolish, and ignorant to give *herself* for the work; she was too poor to give any *money*, and the little she had saved with much care must go now for the doctor's bill; she had tried to give her *time*, but her antimacassars would not sell, and she could not paint photographs; then she tried her *influence*, but she did not think she had any, for every one laughed when she spoke to them about the missions, and Mrs. Gardener Jones was offended when she gave her a tract with a negro's face on it, and "Am I not a man and a brother?"

"Then there was only my prayers, Mr. John, and I did think I could have done that at least; and I did keep on regularly with that prayer out of the magazine, but the last three nights I've been so tired and worn out that Betty would make me say

my prayers after I was in bed, and I don't really think I could have knelt down, and every night I've dropped off to sleep before I got to the poor heathen. So I've failed in that too. And I've been thinking, thinking, thinking, as I sat here to-night, Mr. John, that perhaps the Lord would not take my barley-loaves, because they were so good-for-nothing; but I'd nothing else, nothing else!"

I do not think that John Rossitter had ever spoken a word on religious subjects in his life; he avoided discussion on such matters like the plague, and he was one of those reserved, deep natures who shrink from letting curious eyes peer into the sanctuary of their faith, and from dissecting their religious opinions with that clumsy scalpel the tongue. Uninspired words seemed to him to be too rude and unwieldy to convey the subtle mysteries of faith, to break with their jarring insufficiency into the harmony of praise, to weigh down the wing of prayer that is struggling towards

Heaven, to trouble the waters where we are trying to see the reflection "as in a glass darkly." There is but one power can open the close-sealed lips of such a nature, and that is when the angel takes a live coal from the great Altar of love and lays it on his mouth, and then he speaks, and with a power wanting in the glib outpourings of a shallower nature. And so John Rossitter found himself speaking words of comfort to Miss Toosey, which seemed like a new language to his unaccustomed lips; telling her how small, how poor everything earthly is in God's sight, and yet how nothing is too small, nothing too poor for the good Lord's notice; how the greatest saint is, after all, only an unprofitable servant; and how He can take a loving, humble heart in His hand and make it as much as He would.

"And you're sure, quite sure, that it's not because He's angry with me that He has not made use of me?"

"Dear old friend, He may make use of you yet."

She was coughing badly just then, and when the fit was over she shook her head. "Not very likely now, Mr. John; but He knows I was willing, so it doesn't matter."

She got more cheerful then, and asked him to come and see her again before he went back to London, which he promised to do; and then he rose to go away.

"You must not fret about the empty box," he said, "or I shall scold you next time I come. And, look here, Miss Toosey, you have never asked me to subscribe though I have often teased you by pretending to put buttons and rubbish into the box."

"Will you really?" she said. "I always fancied that you did not hold with missions, and thought them rather nonsense, though you were so kind to me about it; but if you would it would be a comfort to think the box was not quite empty."

He felt in his pocket, but his purse was not there. "You must give me credit, Miss Toosey," he said, smiling; "I shall

consider it a debt. I promise to give—let me see—I must think how much I can afford. I promise to give *something* to your mission. And now make haste to bed, and get well."

She was collecting her things together to go upstairs,—her spectacle-case, Bible, and one or two books, and out of one of them a printed bit of paper slipped and fluttered to John Rossitter's feet as he stood at the door. It was the prayer for missions cut out of the magazine. He picked it up.

"And don't fret yourself about the prayer either," he said; "let me have it, may I? And suppose I say it for you? And don't you think that 'Thy kingdom come' will do for your missionary prayer till you are better?"

And she smiled and nodded just like her old self as he went out.

"She will soon be better," John said to Betty, as he passed her in the passage; but he did not guess how soon.

"Mother," he said next morning, coming into the breakfast-room with a large bunch of bloomy grapes in his hand, "will you make my peace with Rogers? I have cut the best bunch in his house, and I go in fear of my life from his vengeance."

"My dear John, how very inconsiderate you are! He will be so vexed! Why could not you have asked him for it?"

"It was a sudden temptation that overtook me when I passed through, and I am going to take them to Miss Toosey, and if there is anything else nice you can suggest for that poor little soul, I'll take it along with them."

Mrs. Rossitter was kind-hearted and liberal, and she promised to send one of the maids into Martel that afternoon with some invalid dainties; but John insisted on taking the grapes himself, and marched off with them after breakfast, regardless of the expostulations of his mother and Humphrey, who had other views for passing the morning.

As John Rossitter turned the corner into North Street he ran up against Mr. Ryder, and stopped to talk to him about the pheasant-shooting in the Rentmore coverts. "I am just going to ask for Miss Toosey," he said, as they were parting.

"Miss Toosey? Then you need not go any further—she died last night."

"Died!"

"Yes, poor old soul; and it was only a wonder that she lived so long."

John Rossitter turned and went on without another word, leaving the doctor staring after him in surprise. He went on to the house mechanically, and had knocked at the door before he recollected that there was no longer any object in his visit. Betty opened the door, with a red, swollen face, and burst out crying at sight of him, and threw her apron over her head in uncontrolled grief.

"All right," he said, "I know;" and passed by her and went into the little parlour, and sat down in the same chair

that he had sat in the night before, and again involuntarily lifted the missionary-box in his hand. Presently Betty, having partly recovered herself, sidled into the room, glad of company in the "unked" quiet of the house. He asked no questions, and by and by she summoned courage to tell him how the quiet end came at midnight. "Miss Baker have been in this morning already, asking me no end of questions, and she were quite put out with me because I hadn't nothing to tell, and because Miss Toosey, poor dear! hadn't said a lot of texes and fine things. She says, 'Was it a triumphal death?' says she. And I said as how I didn't know what that might be; and then she worritted to know what was the very last words as ever Miss Toosey said, and I didn't like for to tell her, but she would have it. You see, sir, the old lady said her prayers just as usual, and when I went in to see as she were all right on my way to bed, she says, 'I'm pretty comfortable, Betty,' says she;

'good night to you; and you've not forgotten to give Sammy his supper?'—as is the cat, sir. And them's the last words she uttered; for when I come in half-an-hour after, hearing her cough, I see the change was a-coming. But Miss Baker she didn't like it when I told her, though it were her own fault for asking; and she says, 'So she didn't testify to her faith,' says she. And I didn't know what she might mean, so I says, 'She were always good and kind to me and every one,' says I; and so she were," added Betty, touching unknowingly on a great truth; "and if that's testifying to her faith, she've adone it all her life."

And then she left him sitting there and musing on the quiet close of a quiet life, or rather the quiet passing into fuller life; for what is death but "an episode in life"? There was nothing grand or striking in Miss Toosey's death—there very rarely is; it is only now and then that there is a sunset glory over this life's evening; generally

those around see only the seed sown in weakness and dishonour; generally when the glad summons comes, "Friend, come up higher," the happy soul rises up eager to obey, and leaves "the lower places" without giving those left behind even a glance of the brightness of the wedding garment, or a word of the fulness of joy in the Bridegroom's Presence.

And presently John Rossitter came away, and though he held the missionary-box thoughtfully in his hand he put nothing into it. Had he forgotten his promise to Miss Toosey, which he said he regarded as a debt, to give something to her mission?

* * * * *

"And so there is an end of poor Miss Toosey and her mission!" said Mr. Peters a few days later, as he met Mr. Glover returning from her funeral at the cemetery; and Mr. Glover echoed the words with a superior, pitying smile—"So there is an end of poor Miss Toosey and her mission!"

Poor Miss Toosey! Why do people so often use that expression about the happy dead? Surely they might find a more appropriate one for those who have left the sordid poverty of life behind them and have entered into so rich an inheritance! Of course they do not really mean that it was "an end of Miss Toosey," for did they not say every Sunday, "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting"? and how could they call that an end which was only the beginning of new life? So this was only a figure of speech. But perhaps you will echo Mr. Glover's sigh over the end of her mission, and regret that such zeal and ardour should have been wasted and produced no results. Wait a bit! There is no waste in nature, science teaches us, neither is there any in grace, says faith. We cannot always see the results, but they are there as surely in grace as in nature.

That same evening John Rossitter wrote to the Bishop of Nawaub, and very humbly

and diffidently offered himself, his young life, his health and his strength, his talents and energies, his younger son's portion, all that God had given him, for his Master's use; and the Bishop, who never ceased to pray "the Lord of the Harvest to send forth labourers into the harvest," "thanked God and took courage."

THE END.

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